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The fake message on WhatsApp that caused alarm brought before the FBI

At the state level, Pedro Janer expects the Justice Department to file charges for violation of DSP law

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By [Alex Figueroa Cancel](#)

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"Of course not. How are we going to do that? This is how the Secretary of State, Elmer Román, replied to false information about the closure of supermarkets on the island due the coronavirus.

State authorities consult with the [Federal Bureau of Investigation \(FBI\)](#) about possible violations of the law by the person who disclosed an audio on [WhatsApp](#) inciting citizens to stock up urgently because Governor Wanda Vazquez was supposed to implement a total closure of shops, including supermarkets, pharmacies and gas stations.

This was reported by Department of Public Safety (DSP) secretary Pedro Janer, who said they are also waiting for the Puerto Rico Department of Justice to bring state charges for actions affecting government measures to prevent the spread of [COVID-19 coronavirus](#).

"We are consulting with the FBI and also the Department of Justice. In addition, we worked with the Police Cybercrime Unit to try to positively identify this person and have the sanctions applied to him," Janer told *El Nuevo Día*.

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"It cannot be allowed for someone to cause such massive chaos with something of an unofficial, ill-informed or even bad faith nature," he added.



Since Friday, through messaging chats such as WhatsApp, he circulated an audio of a person who identified himself as an active member of the church Casa de Restauración and claimed that Vázquez Garced was preparing to announce a total closure of all businesses, as well as the ports, according to information provided by another pastor named Angel Molina.

On Saturday, March 21, thousands of people filled commercial outlets to buy supplies, which was listed by health experts as a risk of contagion, as well as a reaction to false information.

"We are waiting for an answer from the federal jurisdiction, but this person using social media or WhatsApp could violate FCC (Federal Communications Commission) rules and then we would have to submit it to the FCC to see if they are interested in filing charges," Janer said.

In the past, federal authorities have prosecuted people in Puerto Rico for using social media - such as Twitter and Facebook - to post direct threats to individuals or entities, including the alleged placement of explosive devices somewhere.

"It is a crime to shout fire when there is no fire and any kind of warning that is not happening and that forces the masses to mobilize, and induces a chaotic situation, all of that can be penalized," Janer said.

For her part, THE FBI spokeswoman for Puerto Rico, Lymari Cruz, indicated that she could not confirm or deny that the agency received or was investigating the DSP's referral.

However, Cruz said they keep the ic3.gov page active to report and evaluate complaints of people who used the media to commit crimes.

"Puerto Rico is not the only place where they have tried to take advantage of the crisis to spread false information and create alarm and try to sell miracle remedies," said Cruz, who said that this week they will launch a social media orientation campaign, "to educate people to understand the modality of these new threats.

He stated that "as for the WhatsApp message, we do not deny or confirm, but we can say that we are very disappointed that a person may use a situation like this to cause panic."

"No matter who is behind it, as a people we should all recognize that we are in this together," he explained. "By causing panic, they take to the streets and hurt themselves and others, and they damage the economy because they buy things they don't need and prevent others who do need them from being able to get them."

Meanwhile, Janer seemed confident that at the state level there would be violations of section 6.14 of Law 20 of 2017, which creates the PSD.

That article states that there will be fines of up to \$5,000 or jail of up to six months for anyone who: "Sounds a false alarm in relation to the imminent occurrence of a catastrophe in Puerto Rico or, if there is already a state of emergency or disaster, spread rumors or false alarms about non-existent abnormalities."

"He (the man who speaks in the audio) mentions a certain apostle Angel Molina, who is alleged to have brought the information that led to chaos," Janer said.

He added that they're looking for the person to "interview him".

"So far, we haven't found the person, but we're digging and we're going to enforce the executive order," he said. "We are not attacking churches or religious creeds. But when in an emergency, freedom of expression has its parameters."

On the other hand, Janer was generally optimistic about fulfilling the curfew order.

Over the past two nights, there have been reductions in the number of arrests and complaints compared to the first few days following the government's measure seeking social distancing.

"So far people are behaving well. Most Puerto Ricans are patiently complying with the governor's order and that's what we want," he said.

"Information takes a while to filter (to citizens in general)... There will be a third circular specifying things (about the curfew). I hope this situation will be resolved because people are largely cooperating," he said.

No Cause Found against Pastor for Message Sent through WhatsApp

The audio caused hundreds of Puerto Ricans to crowd the supermarkets.

By [TELEMUNDO PR](#) • Published May 07, 2020 • Updated at 8:22 pm May 07, 2020



Archivo

Police reported Thursday that after filing charges against a pastor for allegedly disseminating false information through WhatsApp, no cause was determined.

According to the authorities, Pastor José Luis Rivera Santiago was summoned to the court of San Juan to the investigating room and was consulted with the District Attorney of San Juan Alfredo Carrión, who instructed filing charges under Law 20 "Law of the Department of Public Safety of Puerto Rico" Article 6.14, because on the date of March 20, 2020, there already being a national emergency and using a means of digital communication, such as the "WhatsApp" application, he disseminated an audio in which he spread rumors and / or gave false alarms about alleged non-existent abnormalities.

The same alerted about the closure of supermarkets and pharmacies, which was denied by the governor.

The evidence was presented to Judge Maranyelí Colón, who determined no cause.

This case was investigated and submitted by Agent Abrahán Lebron 21549 under the supervision of Sergeant Carlos Nieves 8-34895 of the Theft and Fraud to Banking and Financial Institutions Investigation Division.

